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The Role of Social Media in Promoting Special Events: Acceptance of Facebook 'Events'

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Abstract

This study examines Facebook 'events' as a medium for promoting special events to consumers. This study proposes a Social Technology Acceptance Model, an extension of the TAM model, to examine the influence of trust, expected relationships and perceived enjoyment in forming consumer attitudes towards Facebook and consumers intentions to attend an event. Data was collected through an online survey administered through special event organizer's Facebook 'Pages'. Findings of the study suggest that users' trust and expected relationship through Facebook had a significant effect on users' acceptance of Facebook and their intended offline behaviour to attend the event. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Social Capital, Web 2.0, Marketing, Consumer Behavior

1 Introduction

The virtualization of human social interactions can be attributed to the development of Web 2.0 technologies and individual's acceptance of those technologies. Recently, CGM(consumer generated media) and peer-to-peer applications known as Web 2.0 or social networking media have been perceived as a new form of word-of-mouth communication that occurs beyond the traditional social circles of consumers. (Gretzel, Kang and Lee, 2008). Social Media has gained substantial popularity in the context of online travellers' use of the Internet, as travellers can share their experiences with friends, family, tourism business, and strangers by posting their stories, comments, photos and videos (Xiang and Gretzel, 2009). Social Media or Web 2.0, also referred to as "Travel 2.0" in tourism has introduced a wide range of new advanced technology applications including media, content syndication, tagging, blogging, web forums, customer ratings and evaluation systems, virtual worlds, podcasting and online videos and so forth (Xiang, and Gretzel, 2009). In other words, the term "Web 2.0" refers to a perceived second generation of web development and design, that aims to facilitate communication, secure information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web (O'Reilly, 2005). There seems to be a consensus that social media is an innovative feature of the World Wide Web (Dippelreiter, 2008; Eyrich, 2008; Subrahmanyam, 2008; Gorringer, 2009). The core idea of social media is defined as: *"information content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies that is intended to facilitate*

communications, influence and interaction with peers and with public audiences, typically via the Internet and mobile communications networks.” (Wikipedia, 2009)

Tourism, as stated by Werthern and Klien (1999), is a hybrid industry that is dominated by information yet at the same time has a very real and physical service. This illustrates how unique of an industry tourism is and suggests that the application of technology in the virtual world can be as effective as marketing in the physical world. The technology and globalization push from the 1990s has changed the way markets now interact, *“Markets are becoming faster, bigger, more uniform as well as segmented, and more competitive”* (Werthern & Klien, 1999). By examining how technology is utilized by consumers through the assimilation of information, researchers get a better view of the effectiveness of online marketing as well as how consumer created content effects consumer decision making.

According to Complete.com (2009) their most recent July 2009 ranking of social networking sites Facebook has become the most used social networking site world wide, with 122 million unique visits during that month. Facebook has shown a +220.52% yearly growth and has twice as many unique visits compared to MySpace, the second ranked social networking site with 59 million unique visitors in the same month. Along with the increase of traffic to Facebook the site’s interactive features have also been adapted for commercial purposes. New individualized “pages” allow for companies, non-profits, and special interest groups, as well as organizers of special events and festivals. These pages allow them to showcase their products and reach out to consumers. Facebook is a powerful online social media tool to reach countless individuals.

Research on the marketing implications of social media, especially within the fields of tourism and special events, have recently started to take root in response to the proliferation of information technologies and the surge in new users. Most of the recent studies have been broad in focus, examining the most popular social media sites and briefly examining their potential (Todi, 2008; McGrath, 2008; O’Connor, 2008; Subrahmanyam, 2008; Gumpert, 2007). Taking a more focused approach this study examines the role Facebook has on actual marketing of special events primarily through the use of Facebook’s “Events” features. This study uses an extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to examine the role of trust and the expected relationship with special events’ organizers on Facebook in the formation of consumer attitudes’ towards Facebook as a medium for finding out about special events, and consumers intentions to attend the events.

2 Literature Review

With the rapid growth in the number users frequently logging-on to Facebook, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) can provide insight for special event organizers and marketers into the full potential and capabilities of Facebook in building relationships and promoting events to users. This builds upon the TAM by examining the roles of Trust, Expected Relationships, and Percieved Enjoyment in forming Attitudes towards Facebook and influencing intentions to attend an event.

The TAM includes the variables Perceived Usefulness (PU), Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Attitude. The TAM model assumes that people are likely to adapt a new technology to the extent that they believe it would be helpful for them to perform the job better, which refers to PU. With regard to PEOU, it is the degree to which an individual believes that using a new technology would be free of cognitive effort (Zhang, Zhao and Tan, 2008).

A user's enjoyment is one of the most important aspects contributing to a Websites success (Liu and Arnett, 2000). The intrinsic motivation of enjoyment has also been added as a predictor in technology acceptance behaviour (Zhang, Zhao and Tan, 2008). The extended TAM presented in this study includes a perceived enjoyment variable, which refers to the enjoyment of the experience using Facebook. Dong (2009) employed an extended TAM, with the use of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation variables, on Second Life users. The results of the study suggest that a users' several intrinsic and extrinsic motivations contribute to the enjoyment of participating in Second Life and that empathy is a key component for the enjoyment for intrinsic users while synchronicity was found to have the same importance for extrinsic users. All the while, self-efficacy was found to be equally important to both group of users. The study also suggests that the community interactions associated with Second Life have an affect on the participation. While Dong's (2009) study focuses on the "love of the game" and coercion motivations, the study itself sets up a fundamental bases for this study of how an individual's relationships and trust add on to what is already known about user acceptance of new technologies and in turn their attitude and intentions.

Additionally, the current study examines the Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use associated with the influences of an individual's emotional response through their level of perceived enjoyment in using social media tools. Previous studies have investigated how an individual's emotional response influences Perceived Use and Perceived Ease of Use in the context of the individual's job environment, educational endeavours and using World Wide Web by indicating that positive and/or negative emotions such as; anxiety, joy, distaste and pleasure could predict overall technology acceptance (Saade & Kira, 2006 Venkatesh, 2000 and Wu & Lee, 2006). The present study proposes that individuals' Perceived Enjoyment level will influence their Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use while using Facebook, and in turn will result in a higher attitudes towards Facebook and greater intentions to attend a special events promoted through Facebook. Sas, Dix, Hart, and Su (2009) study shows that individuals using Facebook are more engaged in communication to other individuals they are familiar with and as such provide emotional support to each other increasing their enjoyment of online social media tools. This exchange of ideas creates a virtual social support system in which the individuals are able to build upon the trust already established and thus reflecting a positive perception of Facebook.

Social media and related technologies can be facilitators of social capital as they allow individuals to maintain sustained interactions with a large and diverse network

of contacts. Although people often accumulate social capital as a result of their daily interactions with friends, co-workers, and strangers, it is also possible to make conscious investments in social interaction (Resnick, 2002).

Valenzuela, Park, & Kee's (2008) study indicated that there is a positive relationship between social media, specifically Facebook, and social capital as related to behaviors and attitudes. Their study focuses on how individuals interact with other individuals and how these interactions are perceived. Further, they suggest that social media can solidify a person's relationship and/or strengthen the person's trust of old and new acquaintances. Dwyer, Hitlz, & Passerini (2007) examined the relationship between trust, both in Facebook and other Facebook users, and the development of new relationships. Their findings suggest that trust is not necessary in developing new relationships on social networking sites, rather that trust is an important factor in the amount of information shared and the type/depth of a relationship. The social capital resulting from the relationships between people can contribute to knowledge sharing (Chow and Chan, 2008). More specifically, the social capital coinciding with social networks, social goals and social trust can influence the attitude and subjected norm about knowledge sharing and affect individual's intentions to knowledge sharing (Chow and Chan, 2008).

A Trust and TAM model has been well studied in the area of online shopping (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003) and the adoption of on-line tax systems (Wu & Chen, 2005). The model used in those studies conceptualizes trust from a social exchange theory (Kelley, 1979) perspective, where trust, as a antecedent to a successful business transaction is influenced by the Perceived Ease of Use of an online vendor. Trust in turn then influences the Perceived Usefulness and Intended Use of the online vendor. The model presented in the present study suggests that Trust is and Antecedent to Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use as mediated through Expected Relationships and Perceived Enjoyment. Trust is a precursor to strong social capital and strong relationships, which in the context of social media can both influence the perceived level of enjoyment.

As a result of the literature review the hypothetical model is presented in Figure 1. The Social TAM model is an extension of the TAM model (Lee, Kozar, & Larsen, 2003), and incorporates social constructs of trust, expected relationship and Perceived enjoyment. Further the model seeks to explain both attitude towards social media, and the offline behaviour intentions of individuals as a reflection of their acceptance of the technology. This study tests the model within the context of Facebook users intention to attend special events that they were invited to by Special events organizers through Facebook 'Pages' and Facebook 'Events'. The following sections explore the methods employed and the testing of the model. Implications and conclusions from the research are then examined.

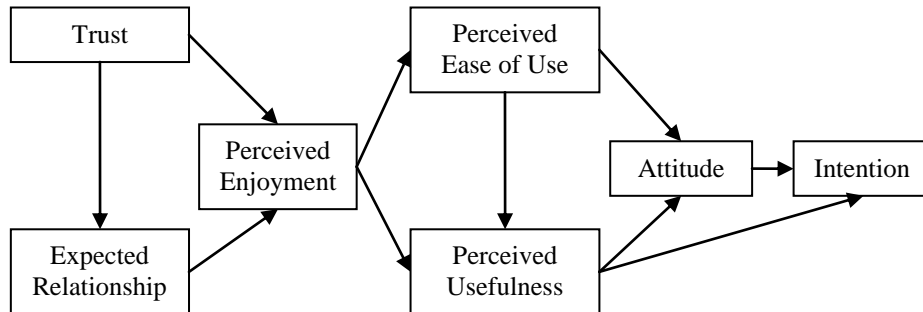


Figure 1. Proposed Hypothetical Social TAM ($p < .01$)**

3 Methods

Data for the study was collected using a web-based survey that was administered throughout a 4-week period during and after selected special events held in Phoenix in spring 2009. An online survey was sent to 800 randomly selected persons who were invited to the events through Facebook. More specifically, surveys were sent out through Facebook to fans of the different special event Facebook 'Pages'. The Facebook pages consisted of Phoenix Metro area special events; The Great Arizona Beer festival and Phoenix Pride celebration, as well as undergraduate students at Arizona State University, who had been to other events promoted through Facebook. The response rate was about 20 percent, which resulted in 155 usable responses. Those who were invited to events promoted through Facebook in Phoenix were asked to indicate whether they have been invited to an event using Facebook before, the usefulness of Facebook, the ease of use and enjoyment of Facebook for sharing and finding out about events. Furthermore, they were asked to indicate how their level of trust of the information on provided by event organizers on Facebook and their expected relationship through Facebook. Finally, respondents were asked to indicate the intention to attend the events that they were invited to through Facebook. Each item was measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). Descriptive analyses, Discriminant Validity, Reliability and Path analyses were used to test the proposed relationships of the extended TAM model including trust and expected relationships variables.

4 Results

4.1 Reliability and Validity

The internal consistency reliability (ICR) of each construct was measured by computing the composite reliability coefficients. According to Bagozzi and Yi (1988), it was suggested that all composite reliabilities should be above the .60 benchmark.

As shown Table 1, the internal consistency reliability values ranged from .85 (Intention) to .95 (Attitude). Since none of the values for all seven constructs including Trust, Expected Relationships, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Enjoyment, Attitude and Intention were less than .6, the reliability of the scales could be accepted.

Discriminant validity of the constructs, presented in Table 1, can be confirmed when the estimated correlations of the constructs are not excessively high ($> .85$) or excessively low ($< .10$) (Kline, 1998). Based on the value of all the correlation estimates between the associated constructs, all values fell in the acceptable range, which indicated that the discriminant validity of the constructs was supported. At the same time, the convergent validity was also evaluated by the average variance extracted (AVE). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), it was recommended that AVE values higher than .5 are acceptable. The average variance extracted for all seven constructs exceeded the threshold value of .5, thus it can be claimed that discriminant validity was justified. Furthermore, for a satisfactory degree of discriminant validity, it was argued that the square root of AVE of an each construct should exceed the inter-construct and the other constructs in the model (Gefen and Straub, 2005). With regard to this research, even though some of the variables present relatively high inter-correlations, the convergent and discriminant validity of this model were satisfactory, showing all the AVE square roots are above .8

Table 1. Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	Trust	Relate*	Enjoyment	Ease of Use	Usefulness	Attitude	C.R	A.V.E.
Trust							.88	.85
Relate*	.68**						.92	.89
Enjoyment	.69**	.62**					.91	.88
Ease of Use	.62**	.47**	.67**				.88	.85
Usefulness	.69**	.55**	.73**	.82**			.86	.82
Attitude	.69**	.64**	.77**	.64**	.68**		.95	.93
Intention	.63**	.68**	.67**	.57**	.59**	.75**	.85	.81

Note: Relate stands for Expected Relationship, C.R. is Composite Reliability, A.V.E. is Average Variance Extracted, ** $p < .01$*

4.2 Path Analysis

A path analysis was conducted to validate the hypothetical Social Technology Acceptance Model (Figure 1), which adds the social constructs of trust, expected relationship variable, and perceived enjoyment to the TAM model. The basic assumption of this study is that users' trust of information about an event on Facebook can influence the strength of the relationship between users on Facebook, and then it can affect perceived usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment of using the

Facebook, which can lead to their favourable attitude toward using Facebook and finally influence the intention to go to the event.

SPSS Amos 16.0 software using the ML estimation method (Arbuckle, 2007) was used to perform the path analysis with all the casual relationships being tested simultaneously. In the context of reasonable fit for the model, it is recommended that X^2/df should not exceed 3 (Bentler and Bonett, 1989) while GFI should be greater than the recommended value of .8 (Seyal, Rahman and Rahim, 2002). It was also suggested by Bentler and Bonett (1989) that NFI and CFI should be the scores of .9 or higher as the evidence of good fit and RMSEA needs to be around 0.1 (Browne and Cudeck, 1993). All of the goodness-of-fit measures in the study fell into acceptable ranges with scaled $X^2/df = 1.2$, CFI=.99, GFI=.98 NFI=.99; RMSEA=.04, thus it can be acclaimed that the path model for this study provided an excellent fit to the data.

Furthermore, the regression coefficient of each proposed path was positive and significant as shown in Figure 2. Accordingly, it indicated that all hypothesized relationships between constructs (Figure 1) are supported in this study. As the result of the analysis, 40% of the variance of the Intention to go to the event after having looked at Facebook is explained by the specified explanatory constructs. First of all, trust and expected relationships explained 51% of variance in perceived enjoyment. Perceived enjoyment and perceived ease of use together explained 70% of the variance in perceived usefulness. Also, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness explained 27% of variance in attitude toward to use Facebook.

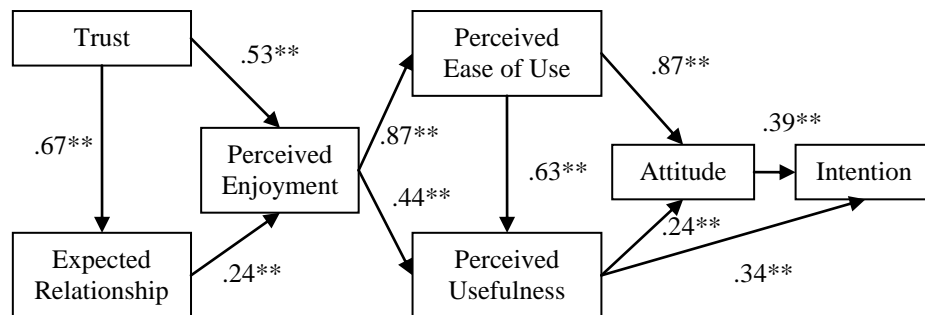


Figure 2. Results of Path Analysis (p<.01)**

This study was able to establish trust of the event information on Facebook users' expected relationship on Facebook as an important and valid construct and its effects on favourable attitude toward using Facebook and intention to go to the event. More specifically, trust of event information on Facebook had a significant effect on the strength of the relationship between users on Facebook ($\beta=.67$, $p<.01$) and the trust and strength of relationship variables had a significant impact on perceived enjoyment ($\beta=.53$, $p<.01$, $\beta=.24$, $p<.01$). Interestingly, perceived enjoyment not only had a direct effect on perceived usefulness ($\beta=.44$, $p<.01$) but also indirectly affected perceived

usefulness through perceived ease of use ($\beta=.87$, $p<.01$). Similarly, Perceived usefulness also not only directly influences the intention to go to the event ($\beta=.34$, $p<.01$) but also indirectly affects intention to go to the event through favourable attitude toward using Facebook ($\beta=.24$, $p<.01$) for sharing and viewing events. In addition, perceived ease of use itself has a strongly impact on attitude toward using Facebook.

5 Conclusions and Implications

Consequently, as expected, the core hypotheses of the Social TAM model were satisfied from this study, which is consistent with previous studies. The results also contributed to the literature ~~with results~~ suggesting that users' trust and expected relationship through Facebook had a significant effect on users' acceptance of Facebook and their actual offline behaviour. While previous extensions of the TAM model focused on the acceptance of technologies, especially ~~in~~ user's adoption of information systems and information technologies, this study focused on the social implications associated with user's acceptance of social media. The findings of this study are important for businesses and organizations as they increasingly adopt marketing strategies focused around social media and consumer generated media. Understanding the social concepts inherent to social media, such as social capital and the related concepts of trust and relationships, and the influence of these concepts on the attitudes towards the technologies being utilized and the influence on consumer behaviour will allow for more successful marketing strategies. The results of this study suggest that businesses should actively seek to build trust with their consumers using their Facebook pages, and that they efforts should be made to focus on making their Facebook Events straightforward and entertaining to be most effective. The findings of this study suggest that user's acceptance of Facebook Events can influence their actual intentions to attend an event.

Future studies should test the Social TAM model proposed by this study in different situations. The model could be further validated by testing it on other social media, like Twitter and Youtube in order to explore any differences in the relationship between acceptance of social media and off-line behaviour intentions. Further, the implications for purchasing behaviour or destination choice of reviews and social relationships/interactions on sites like TripAdvisor or information on sites like Wikitravel, could further be understood. Some limitations of this study could also be overcome through future research. Larger sample sizes would allow for robust statistical methods like structural equation modelling to be used to examine relationships. As this study has a small sample size, the results should not be generalized without future testing of the model will a larger sample.

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